

{As Prepared for Delivery}

**2005 MED Week Conference
Omni Shoreham Hotel, Washington, D.C.
September 13, 2005**

**Opening Remarks
Thomas C. Dorr
Agriculture Under Secretary for Rural Development**

Thank you, David. It is a privilege and a pleasure to be here, and I'd like to personally thank Ron Langston from MBDA and Commerce Secretary Gutierrez for giving USDA Rural Development the opportunity to participate in this year's national MED Week event.

Before we begin, I'd like to ask that you continue to keep the victims of Hurricane Katrina in your thoughts and prayers.

We have seen death, destruction, and social disruption on an exceptional scale. It's not an illusion that hurricane impacts seem to get worse over time. As population grows, as people continue to be attracted to coastal areas, and as the density of development in vulnerable location continues to increase, big storms hit with ever greater impact. This one was very

big. And so is the response effort, which is the largest ever mounted in American history.

I'm proud to say that USDA is playing a major role, and it is a role that will grow over time as reconstruction gets underway.

Prior to Katrina coming ashore, USDA had already pre-positioned food in warehouses in Louisiana and Texas. We've already purchased or diverted from existing sources over twelve million pounds of food and made available food assistance worth over fifty million dollars.

USDA Rural Development has also arranged for 30,000 housing units for those displaced by the storm, and 2100 families have already been placed in 11 states. Our utilities programs are helping bring electrical, sewer and water services back on line. And we will have a very large role to play, particularly in our housing and community facilities programs, as rural communities rebuild.

One of our sister agencies in USDA, the Forest Service, has deployed nearly 3,000 employees who are trained in rescue and response to large-scale incidents. Many more USDA people are serving in other

capacities, including John Cooper, our State Director from North Carolina. John was scheduled to be a presenter here today, but instead he's in Louisiana on one of our jump teams. He sends his regrets, but also his regards -- and his hopes that those of you from North Carolina will follow up this Conference by contacting John back home in a few weeks when things have settled down.

I've not had an opportunity to review the registration list for this Conference, but I'd be willing to bet two donuts and a cup of coffee that a number of you are longtime partners of USDA Rural Development.

And I hope that many more of you will come knocking on our door in the future. That's why we're here -- to describe what we do, and to extend an invitation to do business with us in the future.

Our mission is to increase economic opportunity and improve the quality of life in rural communities.

We are an investment bank for rural America. At current levels, we are investing about \$12-13 billion a year in infrastructure, affordable housing, community facilities, and business development.

That's up about 40% from the \$8-9 billion level of the late 1990's. Since President Bush has taken office, it adds up to over \$54 billion invested and over 1 million jobs created in rural communities.

Bottom line: if you're doing business in rural America, we want you to succeed.

If you're thinking about doing business in rural America, we want to help you get started.

And if you're already making money and creating jobs in rural America, good for you -- and we'd like to talk to you about using your success story as an inspiration and model for others to follow.

Sharing success is important because success -- like failure -- is contagious. Success starts with faith and hope, with energy and inspiration. And then a lot of hard work. Frequently, we don't do a good job of celebrating success in rural America.

Success stories will be a big part of what you will hear from us today.

Naturally we will wave the flag a bit about how USDA Rural Development helped out, but I want you to pay particular attention to the individuals you will meet along the way.

Yes, we have a great story to tell about USDA Rural Development. But you and I both know that if government could bottle success and hand it out on the street, we'd have solved most of the problems of the world a long time ago. It's a little tougher than that.

The real story here isn't us -- it's the people behind the story.

Without entrepreneurs like you to take the lead, to accept the risks, to invest the 12 hour days and 70 hour weeks -- none of the successes you will see today would have happened, with or without government assistance. We can help, but the magic ingredient is you.

Together, we can make a pretty fine team. As a venture capital entity, Rural Development is always looking for the next generation of business leaders. Some of those leaders are here today.

As the saying goes, people looking at the same glass will often differ on whether it's half empty or half full. The entrepreneurs are the ones who say it's half full.

The entrepreneurs are the ones who see opportunities. They're the ones who master the skills needed to seize the opportunities. And they're the ones who will build the future.

When I look at rural America, I see a glass that's half full -- in fact, much more than half full. Rural America faces important challenges, but it also has enormous assets and potential.

It has abundant, affordable land ... clean air and water ... a lower cost structure for most businesses.

It has a high quality, motivated workforce with traditional values and a strong rural work ethic.

The internet revolution gives rural business a global market. Isolation is vanishing and distance means less than ever before.

And rural communities offer a quality of life that no city can match.

So I look at rural America and see opportunity. We are eager to identify partners who will share that vision and who are willing to lead.

One such partner is MBDA.

Over the past year and a half, as many of you may know, we've partnered with MBDA in a series of listening forums designed to improve our delivery of services to minority business communities.

Some of you may have attended those sessions earlier this year in Clarksdale, Mississippi ... Albuquerque, New Mexico ... and Fresno, California.

The goal of those forums, like our goal here today, was to open the door to an expanded partnership between Rural Development and the minority business community.

So whatever else you do today, whatever else you may learn, I want you to walk away with this message: call us. We're here to help.

We've put together a short video that introduces the Rural Development story, and then David Rouzer will take over again to introduce some of the people who make it happen in the field.

And on behalf of President Bush, Secretary Johanns, and a great team at USDA Rural Development, thank you again for this opportunity to join you today. We look forward to working with you. Give us a call. Thank you.